Special Olympics Oklahoma

FLAG FOOTBALL UNIFIED COMPETITION RULES

Team Format

- **5 Players:** 3 Athletes + 2 Partners with a Max roster: **12**

Game

- 2 x 20-minute halves
- 5-minute halftime
- 1 timeout per half
- Running clock

Field & Downs

- 60 x 25 yards
- Start at own 5-yard line
- 4 downs to midfield
- 4 downs to score
- **No-Run Zones:** 5 yards before midfield & goal line

Scoring

- TD = 6
- XP (5 yd) = 1
- XP (12 yd) = 2
- Safety = 2

Running

Allowed: Handoffs behind line of scrimmage

Not Allowed: QB runs, Laterals/pitches, or Diving, spinning, stiff-arms, flag guarding

Passing

- Forward passes only
- Catch beyond line of scrimmage
- 1 player may be in motion
- Interceptions = change of possession

Unified Rule: Partner → Athlete only (Partners cannot throw to Partners)

Defense

- Rushers start 7 yards back
- No contact tackling
- Screen blocking only

Dead Ball

- Flag pulled, Out of bounds, Knee/hand down, Incomplete pass, Interception, or Score

Common Penalties

Offense: 10 yards + loss of down

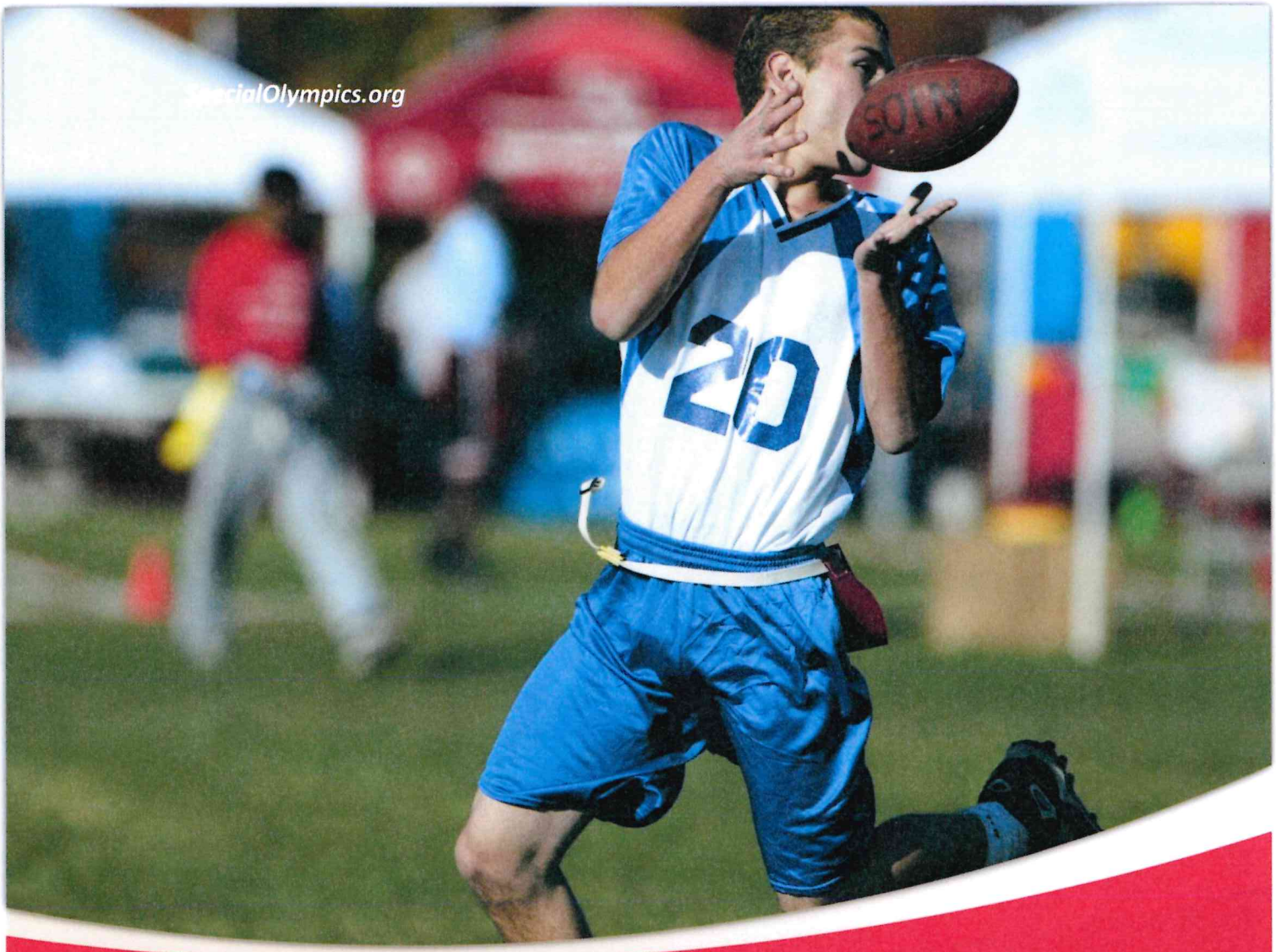
False start, illegal motion/pass, QB run, flag guarding, delay of game

Defense: 10 yards + automatic first down

Offside, illegal rush, illegal contact, illegal flag pull, pass interference

Key Unified Reminder

3 Athletes + 2 Partners on field at all times and all players must be meaningfully involved



Special Olympics North America Official Flag Football Rules

Updated May 17, 2015

Special Olympics

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Note: Bold and Underlined rules in this handbook indicate New Rules or rules that need special attention.

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. Special Olympics has created these rules based upon rules from a national flag football organization.

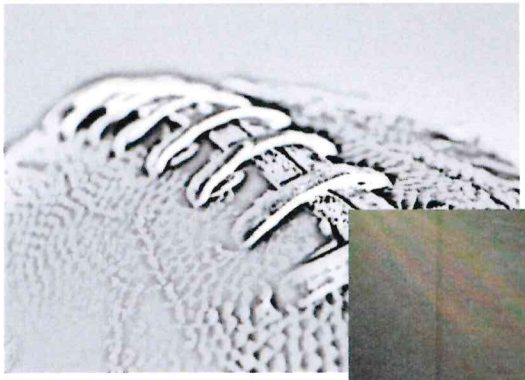
The Game

MODIFIED EVENTS	TRADITIONAL EVENTS	UNIFIED EVENTS
Individual Skills Competition	Traditional Team	Unified Team

1. Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact.
   a. In all aspects of Special Olympics Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
2. Teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
   a. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury.
3. Teams will be grouped in divisions based on a classification round of games.
4. Points of Emphasis
   a. No team shall repeatedly commit penalties/fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
   b. Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes intentionally committing penalties/fouls to gain an advantage.
   c. The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.
5. Coin Toss
   a. A coin toss determines first possession.
   b. Each team will provide two (2) captains.
   c. The officials and team captains will meet three (3) minutes prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
   d. The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense, or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may defer its choice to the second half.
6. Possessions
   a. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5- yard line.
   b. The offense has four (4) plays to cross mid-field
   c. Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four (4) additional plays to score a touchdown.
   d. If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in a prescribed number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite team starts at their 5-yard line.
   e. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, stiff arm, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
   f. The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is pulled or hand/knee touches ground).

Equipment & Uniforms

1. An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
2. A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
3. A one-piece, three-flag belt will be worn during the game at all times.
4. All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts/shorts/pants and matching numbers on front and back which can be tucked in at the waist to avoid obstruction of Flag Pulling.
5. No jewelry maybe worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.)
6. No blue jeans will be allowed.
7. All players must wear athletic shorts without pockets.
8. Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes.
   a. Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.





Terminology

Out of Bounds	The outer perimeter line of the field. They include the sidelines and the back of the end zone lines
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field 7 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of the scrimmage.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback
Quarterback	The offensive player first receiving possession of the ball. The quarterback may not run the ball
Rusher	The defensive player(s) assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
Downs (1,2,3,4)	The offensive squad has 4 attempts or "downs" to advance the ball. They must cross midfield to get another 4 "downs" to score.
Live ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties, live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead ball	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after the play.

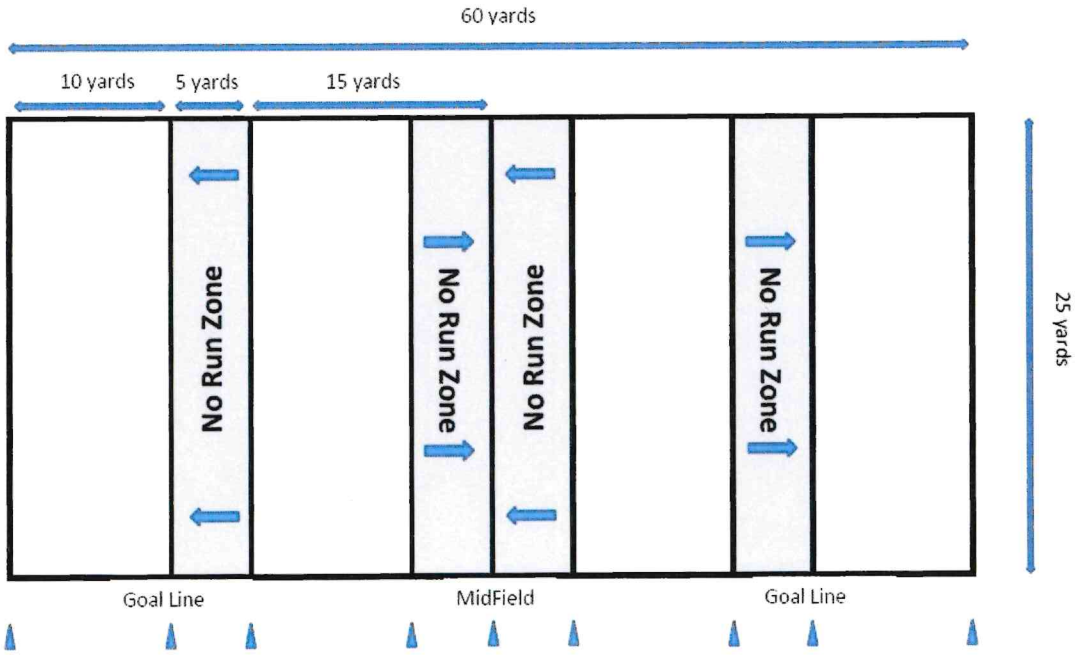
Whistle	Sound made by an official using the whistle that signals the start/end of play or a stop in the action for a timeout, half time, or the end of the game
Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle that is a performed in error.
Screen Blocking	A legal obstruction of an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
Shielding (Flag Guarding)	An act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head, or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand or arm.
Shovel Pass	A legal pass attempted beyond the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot put type manner.
Lateral/pitch	A **BACKWARD PASS** of the ball by the ball carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	A rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.
Shift	A shift is the action of one or more offensive players who after taking positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
Defer	Winner of Coin toss is giving the choice to the other team for the first half of the game. The winner of the coin toss gets choice in the second half.
No Run Zones	Areas of the field where teams can only pass the ball.
Center	Player that snaps ball through legs to begin play.

Field

Playing Field

1. The playing field is 60 yards long (including the end zones) and 25 yards wide. If insufficient space is available, a slightly smaller space can be used. A space of at least 5 yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions. The field can be marked with chalk, paint, and/or traffic cones.
2. No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No-Run Zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
3. Stepping on a boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive team approaches only TWO (2) No-Run Zones in each drive (a 5-yard zone before midfield to gain the first down and before the end zone, 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).

Diagram of Flag Football Field



Rosters

Traditional Teams

1. The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players.
2. Teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
   a. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury.

Unified Sports ®Teams

1. The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players.
2. The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and partners.
3. During competition, teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
   a. the line-up shall never exceed three (3) athletes and two (2) partners at any time.
   b. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players (minus 1 partner or athlete) due to disqualification or injury.
4. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.

Timing & Overtime

Timing

1. The following options are available to the tournament director and will be identified prior to State/Provincial/National competitions based on program needs, time, and number of teams attending. Only one option may be used during the competition.
   i. **Option 1:** The game shall consist of two (2) 20-minute halves (running time).
   ii. **Option 2:** The game shall consist of two (2) 20-minute halves (running time) until the last minute of each half at which the clock will stop on all dead ball whistles (i.e. incomplete pass, out of bands, change of possession).
2. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
3. The clock will stop on all time-outs.
4. Each team receives one (1) 60-second time-out per half.
   I. An unused time-out in the first half does not carry over to the second half.
5. There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.
6. The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of game.
7. **Mercy Rule – If a team is up 25 or more points in the last minute of the game, the clock will continue to run (if using Option 2 stated above in 1ii).**

8. This includes:
    i. Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted time-out,
    ii. Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play,
    iii. Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess time-out has been granted, or
    iv. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.

Overtime

1. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:
    i. A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
    ii. Each team receives two (2) plays from midfield and the team gaining the most points or gaining a yardage advantage is awarded one (1) extra point and wins the game.
    iii. Exceptions to this rule are as follows:
    Interception: The team that intercepts the pass automatically wins the game.
2. If the team with the first attempt in overtime scores on the first play, the opposing team must score on its first play also. If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one (1) team wins.

Scoring

1. **Touchdown**: six (6) points.
2. **Extra Point: one (1) point from the 5-yard line, two (2) points from the 12-yard line (or any distance outside 5 yards due to a penalty).**
3. **Safety**: two (2) point

Coaches Expectations

1. Coaches are typically volunteer parents, friends, or family members helping the players learn and enjoy the game. Parents are **strongly** encouraged to support the coach at all times.
2. Coaches are expected to adhere to the Special Olympics rules and philosophies, coach's guidelines, and code of conduct.
3. Coaches must have the following certifications to participate.
    a. Coaches Volunteer Orientation/General Orientation
    b. an updated OPB (Online Protective Behavior)
    c. a background check.
    d. attend Flag Football Training.

Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. Positions/Snap
   a. The ball must be snapped between the Center's legs to start each play.
   b. No minimum number of players is required to line-up on the line of scrimmage.
2. Dead Balls/Fumbles
   a. There are no fumbles.
   b. Play is ruled dead when:
      i. The ball carrier's flag is pulled;
      ii. The ball carrier loses his/her flag;
      iii. The ball carrier steps out of bounds;
      iv. The ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground;
      v. A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored;
      vi. When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball;
      vii. When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession);
      viii. A pass is intercepted (no returns);
      ix. A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached;
      x. A snapped ball touches the ground;
      xi If fumbled forward, the ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble. If ball falls backwards, it is marked where it hits the ground;
      xii. When there is an inadvertent whistle.
3. Inadvertent Whistle
   a. In case of an inadvertent whistle, the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to re-play the down.
4. Substitutions (Athlete for Athlete/ Partner for Partner)
   a. Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play (Dead Ball).
   b. Each substitute must play at least one (1) down prior to being replaced.
   c. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.
5 Delay of Game
   a. The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of game.
   b. This includes:
      i. Interrupting 30-second count for any reason except for a granted time-out,
      ii. Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play,
      iii. Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess time-out has been granted, or
      iv. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.
6. False Start
   a. No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

Running

1. Handling the Ball by the offense.
   a. Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
   b. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind, or to the side of the quarterback/offensive player, but must be behind the line of scrimmage.
   c. The offense may use multiple handoffs behind the line of scrimmage.
   d. "Center Sneak" – The ball must completely leave the center's hands on the snap and he/she must step backwards off the line of scrimmage in order to receive the direct handoff from the quarterback/offensive player before advancing the ball.
2. Running
   a. The Quarterback (first player gaining possession of the snap) cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage.
   b. Only direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Laterals or pitches (legally known as backward passes) of any kind are not allowed.
      i. In Unified Sports® divisions, a partner may handoff to a partner behind the line of scrimmage.
   c. The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
   d. "No Running Zones" are located 5-yards before the mid-field line and goal line.
      i. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed.
      ii. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
   e. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, stiff arm, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
   f. The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is pulled or hand/knee touches ground).
3. Hurdling
   a. Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or to gain additional yardage is illegal.
      i. Note: Jumping over a player who is on the ground to avoid injury, by official's judgment, is legal.

4. Shielding (Flag Guarding)
   a. Runners shall not shield (flag guard) by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove their flag belt.
   b. This includes:
      i. Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt;
      ii. Stiff arms;
      iii. Placing the ball in a possession over the flag belt; and
      iv. Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt.
      v. Hurdling.

Passing / Receiving

1 Passing and Receiving by the offense.
   a. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
   b. Shovel passes are allowed, but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
   c. All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the Quarterback, if he/she has legally handed-off.
      i. Exception: In Unified Sports® divisions, if a partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers.
   d. Only one (1) player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
   e. A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch.
   f. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception.
      i. Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line.
2. Diving
   a. A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass.
   b. Diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball.
   c. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage.
   d. The team will be penalized accordingly.
3. Eligible Receiver
   a. All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports® divisions where partners are ineligible when partners are throwing the pass.
      i. Unified Sports® teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials.
   b. Failure to "self-patrol" will be considered unsportsmanlike, and will be penalized accordingly.

Rushing the Passer

1. Rushing the Quarterback by defensive players (QB).
   a. All players who rush the Quarterback must be a minimum of 7-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
      i. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 7-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
   b. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
   c. Once the Quarterback hands off the ball, the 7-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

Screen Blocking

1. Screen Blocking
   a. Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
   b. The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back.
   c. Any use of arms, elbows, legs, or shoulders to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.
   d. A player must be on his/her feet before, during, and after screen blocking.
   e. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
   f. There are two form of legal blocking:

      Backfield Blocking: If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.
      i. The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one (1) step.
      ii. The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
      iii. The screen blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
      iv. After the snap of the ball, a blocker may move laterally or backward two (2) steps.

      Downfield Blocking: A basketball style (non-moving) screen is the only acceptable form of downfield blocking. The blocker also may not run between a rusher and ball carrier impeding a defender's progress to the flag.

Flag Pulling

1. Flag Pulling
   a. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
   b. It is illegal to pull or strip the ball from the carrier's possession at any time (penalty).
   c. If a player's flag belt inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends
   d. a defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball (penalty).
   e. Flag Guarding/Shielding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defense's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

Formations

1. Line of Scrimmage
   a. The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team's goal line.
   b. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
2. Motion
   a. Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap.
      i. **This player must be behind the line of scrimmage and not moving toward the line of scrimmage at the time the ball is snapped.**
      ii. If the player comes to a stop he/she must be set for one (1) second.
3. Shift
   a. A shift is the action of one (1) or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
   b. A player who shifts must reset for one (1) second prior to the snap.
4. Snap
   a. A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the Center's legs from the ground to the Quarterback to start a play.

Unified Sports®

1. The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and partners.
2. During competition, teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
   a. the line-up shall never exceed three (3) athletes and two (2) partners at any time.
   b. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players (minus 1 partner or athlete) due to disqualification or injury.
3. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
4. Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.
5. Partners as quarterbacks may NOT pass to another partner.
6. Partners MAY handoff to another partner.
7. Partners shall NOT dominate play.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

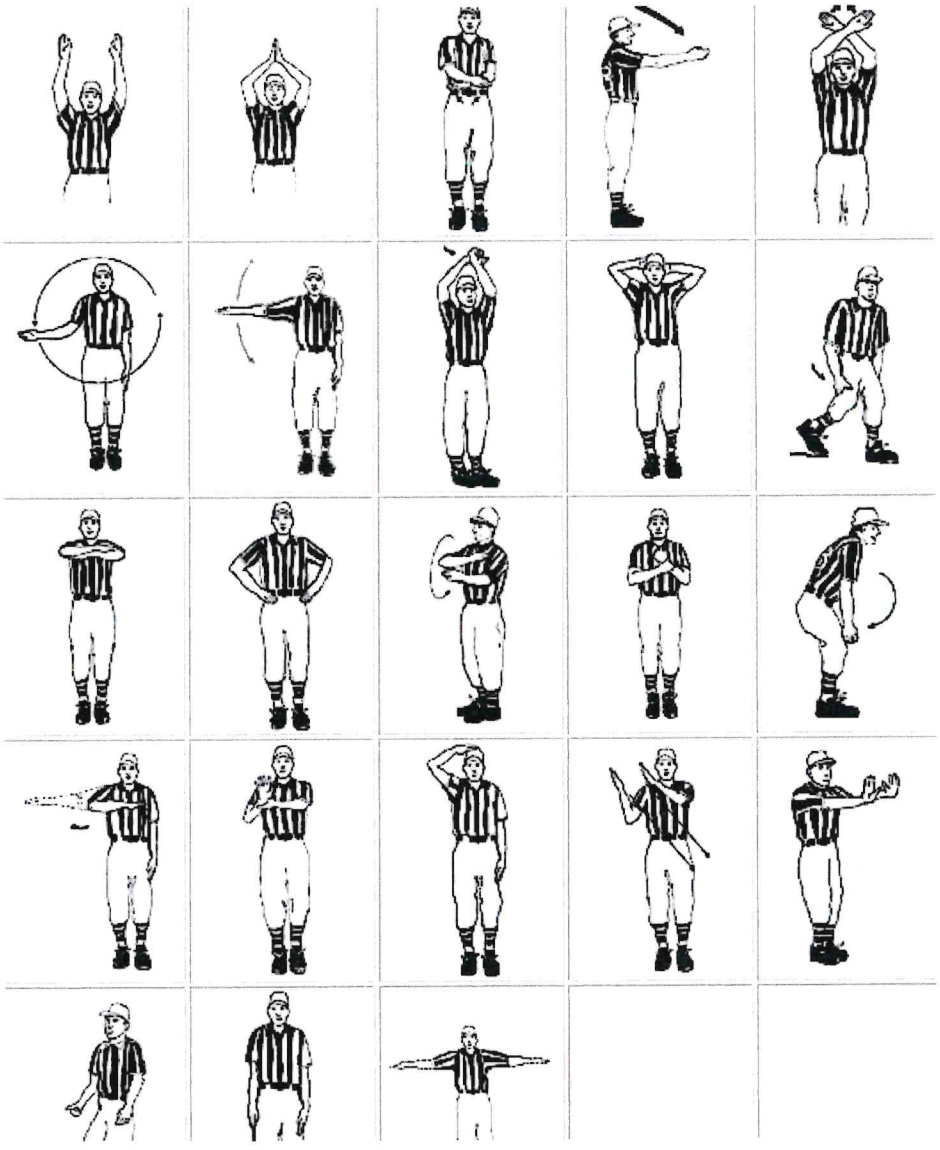
1. Sportsmanship/Roughing
   i. The officials will disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play.
   ii. During player possession, it is illegal for a defensive player to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier at any time.
   iii. No warning is required.
2. Ball carriers *MUST* make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
3. Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

Penalties

1. Penalties
   a. The following options are available to teams which will be identified prior to State/National competition by the State Office or Technical Delegate based on program needs, time, and number of teams. Only one option may be used during the competition.
      i. **Option 1:** Coach's will have the opportunity to decline or accept the penalty based on result of the play.
      ii. **Option 2:** Each team will be allowed to decline a penalty twice during a game. Otherwise, all penalties are automatically accepted
      iii. **Option 3:** All penalties are automatically accepted (no declination).

   b. If using Option 1 or Option 2, the penalty may be accepted while the yardage is declined.

   c. All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
   d. No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
   e. Offense: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down
      i. Illegal Motion (more than one (1) player moving at snap, moving forward at snap);
      ii. Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start);
      iii. Illegal forward/backward pass (pass not completed beyond line of scrimmage; illegal backward pass; Partner to Partner; QB pass beyond line of scrimmage);
      iv. Illegal Procedure (quarterback run);
      v. Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender);
      vi. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping, stiff arming);
      vii. Flag Guarding (driving, spinning, warding off, hurdling); and
      viii. Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 second of ready).
   f. Defense: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
      i. Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap);
      ii. Pass Interference;
      iii. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping, stripping);
      iv. Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball); and
      v. Illegal Rushing (rushing Quarterback inside 7-yard line).



Offensive Penalties and protocol

Illegal Motion	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Offside	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal forward/Backward pass	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal procedure	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Pass interference	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal contact	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Flag Guarding/Shielding	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Delay of Game	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down

Defensive Penalties and Protocol

Offside	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down.
Pass Interference	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down.
Illegal Contact	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down.
Illegal Flag Pull	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down.
Illegal Rushing	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down.